



## Clark Geographic Area

Clark Geographic Area (GA) lies primarily within Sanders County, with small portions in Bonner County in Idaho. National Forest System (NFS) lands amount to 432,000 of the total 528,000 acres, or 82% of this GA. Communities include Trout Creek, Noxon and Heron. The Clark Fork River Valley has been used as a travel corridor since prehistoric times. The nation's second transcontinental railway, built by Northern Pacific, ran through this area and the first road built into northwest Montana was constructed near present-day Highway 200. This portion of the Clark Fork River valley was filled and scoured by the repeated flooding and draining of Glacial Lake Missoula over 10,000 years ago. The ice dams that created Lake Missoula likely occurred in this GA.

### Unique features within this GA include:

- **Cabinet Mountains Wilderness (Wanless Lake and Chicago Peak)**
- **Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Reservoirs**
- **Vermilion River and Vermilion Falls**
- **Historic Bull River Guard Station**
- **Many recreation opportunities, including two rental lookouts**
- **Trout Creek National Recreation Trail**

Recreational activities within Clark GA center on hunting and fishing, which provide a major economic boost for the area. The GA contains a total of 1,544 miles of existing roads, 844 of which are National Forest System Roads. Of these, 341 miles are open yearlong and 50 miles are seasonally restricted.

On NFS lands, the dominant vegetation types are western redcedar, western hemlock, Douglas-fir, and ponderosa pine. Cool and moist alpine fir, spruce, larch, and mountain hemlock dominate at higher elevations. River bottoms, such as the Clark Fork River and Bull River, have extensive cottonwood stands dependent on river flooding. Many unexpected coastal plant species are found within this GA. Since 1980, approximately 2% has been harvested to regenerate trees and is currently under management as plantations or naturally regenerated stands, with small to medium size trees. An additional 1% has been partially cut, leaving mostly medium to large size trees. Currently, 16% is in an old growth forest condition, or very near old growth (replacement) where large, old trees are a significant component of the forest.

Fires have occurred sporadically throughout the GA, primarily within mountainous terrain and along the Cabinet Wilderness face. Fires of 1994 and 2000 covered smaller portions of this GA.

Channel conditions in this GA reflect consequences of the glacial lake (Missoula) that once occupied the Clark Fork River Valley. Most streams, including major named ones, go underground as they approach the river. There are concerns in some of the watersheds in this GA as a result of past management activities and fire. Many of the watersheds contain stream segments identified in the 1996 Montana State 303(d) (Impaired Waterbody) List.

The Clark Fork River provides habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge Dams have created warm-water conditions that maintain a nationally-acclaimed recreational bass fishery for both largemouth and smallmouth. However, the dams also continue to have negative effects on native fish populations and downstream habitat, particularly with regard to access by migratory fish to spawning habitat and cold water habitat for native fishes.

This GA contains populations all of the big game species including bighorn sheep and mountain goat, as well as the largest elk herds on the Kootenai. The GA also contains many of the threatened and endangered species, including grizzly bear and lynx, and many of the sensitive species listed for the Kootenai. Areas north of the river are within the Cabinet/Yaak Grizzly Bear recovery zone. The Clark Fork River and associated reservoirs and wetlands provide habitat for a diverse number of bird species.

There are 40,000 acres of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness in this GA. The area contains twenty separate Inventoried Roadless Areas totaling 201,000 acres or 46% of the NFS land in the GA. Other special designations include several portions of the Cabinet Additions and about half the Scotchman Peaks Recommended Wilderness Areas; Trout Creek and Cataract Creek Primitive Recreation Areas; Ulm Peak Research Natural Area; Bull River Guard Station Cultural Resource Area, Devils Gap and Berray Mountain Cedars Special Interest Areas, and portions of the Bull and Vermilion Rivers are eligible as recreational or wild categories of Wild and Scenic Rivers.